

Watergate revelations:

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Nixon's spy plans exposed

By JOHN COOK

To the dismay of the White House, further revelations of the domestic espionage plan drafted by an ad hoc interagency intelligence committee are coming to light.

Excerpts of documents relating to the master plan, drawn up in June 1970 by the heads of the FBI, CIA, DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) and the NSA (National Security Agency) and approved by President Nixon, were published in the New York Times last week. They list aspects of the plan and the attempts by the committee's coordinator, White House insider Tom Huston, to implement it. J. Edgar Hoover, then-director of the FBI, had footnoted his objections to the plan and succeeded in limiting, but not defeating, its effective use over the last two years.

Instances of the use of the illegal "Gestapo" methods outlined in the plan continue to surface contrary to White House assertions that it had been scrapped.

Excerpts of the memos indicate plans for:

--Monitoring international communications (telephone and telegrams): "(The) National Security Council Intelligence Directive... is to be interpreted to permit NSA to program for coverage of the communications of U.S. citizens using international facilities."

--Electronic surveillances and penetrations: "Intensify coverage of individuals and groups in the U.S. who pose a threat to the internal security. Also, coverage of foreign nationals and diplomatic establishments...."

--Mail coverage: "Restrictions on legal coverage are to be removed, restrictions on covert coverage are to be relaxed...."

--Surreptitious entry (burglaries): "Restraints on the use of surreptitious entry are to be removed."

--Spying on campus: "All restraints which limit this coverage are to be removed. Also, CIA coverage of American students (and others) traveling or living abroad is to be increased."

--Domestic intelligence operations: "A permanent committee consisting of the FBI, CIA, NSA, DIA and the military counterintelligence agencies should be appointed to provide evaluations of domestic intelligence estimates, and carry out the other objectives specified in the report. The need for increased coordination, joint estimates and responsiveness to the White House is obvious...."

'CLEARLY ILLEGAL'

The rationale for intensifying burglary operations is exemplary of the pragmatic, if illegal, approach of the whole scheme:

"Use of this technique is clearly illegal: it amounts to burglary. It is also highly risky and could result in great embarrassment if exposed. However, it is also the most fruitful tool and can produce the type of intelligence which cannot be obtained in any other fashion."

"The FBI, in Mr. Hoover's younger days, used to conduct such operations with great success and with no exposure...."

"Surreptitious entry of facilities occupied by subversive elements can turn up information about identities, methods of operation and other invaluable investigative information which is not otherwise obtainable. This technique would be particularly helpful if used against the Weathermen and Black Panthers."

Huston, former president of the right-wing youth group Young Americans for Freedom, was Nixon's liaison with the committee. He clashed head-on with Hoover while attempting to officially revive the plan over the FBI chief's objections and was replaced a few months later by John W. Dean.

Shortly after Dean was dismissed from his post he turned the files on the domestic espionage plan over to federal judge John Sirica, who subsequently delivered them to Sen. Sam Ervin (D-N.C.), chairman of the Senate Watergate Committee.

Ervin intends to broaden the panel's overall investigation of the Watergate affair to include the illegal espionage plan. Presently, some of Ervin's trusted colleagues are reading the texts to determine which parts relating to foreign intelligence will be withheld from the public.

Sen. Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.) made public documents that relate to at least one aspect of the domestic security plan being implemented. The documents, from the FBI, called for the hiring of "student informers" and "potential student informers" two months after Nixon allegedly withdrew his approval of the plan.

Dean also revealed that White House operatives led by E. Howard Hunt had sent a team of agents to Panama to assassinate Omar Torrijos, Panama's head of state, because he had been uncooperative in renegotiating the Panama Canal treaty and was suspected of allegedly trafficking in heroin.

Other reports indicate that the "dirty tricks" division of the CIA had established covert agencies in U.S. cities to intimidate travelers to foreign countries into reporting information on what they saw. One professor, upon returning from People's China, was threatened with having embarrassing personal information revealed unless he complied with the CIA's request.

Nixon was faced with a desperate situation in his domestic intelligence and espionage apparatus. The FBI, under Hoover's leadership, had been reluctant to conduct the illegal surveillance requested by the White House for a number of years. This stemmed partially from the rebukes Hoover was given from the Supreme Court and the Justice Department during the mid-1960s and partially from his increasing personal isolation from other departments in the federal bureaucracy.

Lyndon Johnson faced the same problem during his presidency and came to rely on Army counterintelligence units to conduct domestic spying operations. Public outrage forced limitations on the use of the Army for this purpose, especially when it was learned that senators were among the targets. The program was de-emphasized under Nixon.

Reluctant to confront the powerful Hoover, Nixon went to the CIA to step-up surveillance of Black, Arab, student, antiwar and emerging communist organizations. His appeal to the CIA was based on the assumption that these groups were receiving aid from foreign governments. Richard Helms, director of the CIA at the time, said his agency was unable to substantiate such allegations in its own investigations, however. Helms was replaced as director last year.

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